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❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

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THE Professor of English Literature in one of the best universities in the country, a state university, writes : "In my own department of English Literature, the pupils' deficiencies that I have felt most are their lack of knowledge of the Bible and of English history." When, it may be asked, could the student have been expected to gain this knowledge of the Bible? In college? In Sunday-school? The former affords no opportunity. The latter affords the opportunity perhaps, but in too few cases does it produce any satisfactory results. The experience referred to above is that of every instructor who has taken occasion to examine into the matter. It is an experience which will be repeated over and over again, until men have been given an opportunity for doing a work in the Bible similar to that which they do in other departments of literary work.

WHY do men who are not professing Christians refuse to study the Bible? The explanation usually given is that they do not believe in Christianity, and therefore do not feel any responsibility upon them for doing this work. Is there any fair ground for this conclusion? Who accepts the system of the early Greek and Roman religions? Yet every student unquestioningly gives much time to the study of them, and a fair knowledge of them is recognized as essential to the training of every well educated man. Certainly biblical thought has had more influence on the world than Greek theology; and should not every intelligent man for this reason feel under obligation to have a thorough knowledge of the Bible, whether he believes it or not?

Nor does it need to be added that he is an unfair and unscholarly man who passes judgment without having examined the facts for

himself. Let the student by a careful study of the Bible determine for himself what are its essential principles; then, and not till then, has he any right to say whether or not he believes it. But would not such a position as that referred to be found even more untenable, if a better example were set by Christian men on all sides? Have not the character and contents of the Bible been largely misunderstood by non-professing Christians, because, forsooth, in the hands of these same Christians it has served no other purpose than that of a great receptacle in which to rummage about for a text to be used in the enforcement of some exhortation, or in the establishment of some doctrine? While it is true that the Bible contains the basis for practical Christian living and Christian belief, these are presented in a setting of historical and literary material such that the student cannot correctly estimate the first without the second. If *Christians* showed more respect for the intellectual element in the Scriptures, *skeptics* would also soon begin to look upon them in another light. Till that time we must expect to find many who will sneer at the Bible as the weak literature of a by-gone age, unworthy of the thought of thinking men of the present time. Let the standard be raised.

Is it, after all, a fact that Babylonian material has been found dating as far back as 3,800 B. C.? If so, what is to become of the early chronology of our English Bible? Not a few biblical students have come to feel that Archbishop Usher's chronology is, to all intents and purposes, inspired; that any fact or theory which militates against this system militates against the Bible itself. But the difference between biblical data and men's interpretation of those data should be noted and emphasized. The discoveries which have already been made in the lines of both Egyptian and Assyrian research have shown it to be probable that, in the matter of *numbers*, there are some errors in our present Old Testament text, however perfect it may once have been. It is quite likely that the ordinary conception of the early chapters of Genesis will suffer modification during the coming generation, just as it has suffered modification during the past. If the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon furnish material which will necessitate a modification of any kind, let us be ready to accept the facts and the changes of belief which the facts demand. But in doing this, let us go *slow*. The present positions are, upon the whole, solid and satisfactory. There is always an element of uncertainty about the *new*. We cannot precisely determine just where it may leave us, or under what circumstances we may find it possible to leave it. Let us

have all the light that is to be had. Let us seek only for the truth, and, whatever it may be, when it comes, let it be welcomed. But there is much of what seems to be truth which is such only in *name*. Not every man can distinguish the real from the spurious. Yet every man is responsible to himself for making the distinction. What, under these circumstances, is one's duty? *Clearly*, to search, to keep searching; and to cease searching only when he ceases living.

ARE the representations made in the paragraphs, given below, false or true?

"It is a significant fact that there is a very general complaint, on the part of young ministers, who have graduated from theological seminaries after two, or three, or even four years of continuous study, that they have no practical knowledge of their common English Bible. Plenty of philosophy, not a little theology, a smattering of Hebrew, some Greek exegesis, a *theory* of homiletics, etc., but no real knowledge of the Bible,—no glad and happy familiarity with its great and wide truths apart from their textual relation to the system of theology they have been taught."*

"Does it not seem like an irony, and would it not sometimes provoke a smile, if it were not so serious a matter, to charge a young candidate to preach the Word, when the matter of acquainting himself familiarly and thoroughly with the entire contents of that Word, is the one thing to which he has not been compelled, in his preparation? A preacher can only preach what he has thoroughly learned, and a man can only preach the word, in proportion as his mind is saturated with that word. A man can only preach the word, when his mind has been filled to repletion with Bible events, and Bible thoughts, and Bible expressions. A man can only handle the Word of God effectively, when he is familiar with its contents, and imbued with its spirit. And this familiarity can only come from that rapid and comprehensive study, which is impossible on the basis of Greek and Hebrew, and possible only in the English. No man ought to be ordained to the gospel ministry, till he has thumbed his Bible, in rigid, systematic study, from Genesis to the Revelation; until he has made every book in it a subject of close, historical and analytical research. He may study anything else for which he can find time, but he ought not to be allowed to make this sort of study elective."†

If these statements are true, there is certainly needed a reformation, indeed, a revolution in the present policy of theological instruction. If they are false, theological institutions may justly consider themselves outrageously slandered. How is it?

* Dr. Pentecost, in Sept. "Words and Weapons."

† Rev. D. E. Platter, Canton, Ohio, in a sermon delivered, May, 1887, before the Alumni Association of Lane Seminary (Cincinnati).